



United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

---

September 10, 2012

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman  
The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Howard P. McKeon  
Chairman  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

*Subject: Defense Logistics: Space-Available Travel Challenges May Be Exacerbated If Eligibility Expands*

The space-available travel program is a privilege given to members of the armed forces to provide some relief from the rigors of duty when members are on leave. Retired members of the armed forces were also given the privilege in recognition of a career of such rigorous duty.<sup>1</sup> This privilege may, in certain circumstances, be extended to other categories of passengers, such as dependents of active and retired members of the armed forces. Through the space-available travel program, eligible travelers are permitted to use open seats on certain military-owned or contracted aircraft after all required passengers have been accommodated. Space-available flights fly within the United States, between the United States and overseas, and between overseas locations. The Department of Defense (DOD) designed the space-available program to be a privilege and only extends this privilege to space-available travelers when it does not interfere with the aircraft's mission. These aircraft are not permitted to be rerouted or rescheduled to accommodate space-available passengers, and travel must be without additional expense to the United States. Recently, bills have been introduced in Congress to reauthorize or expand the space-available travel program to potentially include international travel for gray-area retirees (reservists who are entitled to retirement pay at age 60) and their dependents, international travel for reservists and their dependents, and widows and widowers of active duty personnel and reservists and their dependents.<sup>2</sup> Section 362 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 directed GAO to review DOD's space-available travel

---

<sup>1</sup>Department of Defense Regulation 4515.13-R, *Air Transportation Eligibility* (November 1994) (incorporating change 3, Apr. 9, 1998).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, S. 3254, 112th Cong. § 632 (2012), which would codify authority for the space available program, and S. 2112, 112th Cong. (2012), which would potentially require the Secretary of Defense to expand eligibility.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>10 SEP 2012</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2012 to 00-00-2012</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Defense Logistics: Space-Available Travel Challenges May Be Exacerbated If Eligibility Expands</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Washington, DC, 20548</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>36</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

program.<sup>3</sup> This report provides information on (1) the number of passengers that used the space-available travel program from 2009 through 2011, and (2) the effect that an increase in eligible travelers may have on the usage of the space-available program, adherence to DOD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance.

To conduct this work, we interviewed officials in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Transportation Policy; the Departments of the Army, Air Force, and Navy; the Marine Corps; the Joint Staff; the United States Transportation Command and its Air Mobility Command; the Defense Manpower Data Center; and the Department of Veterans Affairs about the space-available travel program. To determine how many passengers used the space-available travel program, we requested relevant data from DOD; however, limited data are actually collected by DOD since it does not consider the space-available program a DOD mission and additional DOD funds cannot be spent to support space-available travel. DOD provided data for the number of space-available passengers who actually traveled and the number of unused seats for space-available travelers for the past 3 fiscal years. DOD does not collect data on the number of persons who wished to travel but did not get a seat on space-available flights. Although we find the data sufficiently reliable for showing the number of passengers who actually traveled and the number of unused seats, we cannot quantify nor estimate the number of travelers who were not able to obtain space-available seats during this period.

To determine the effect an increase in eligible travelers may have on the usage of the space-available travel program, adherence to DOD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance, we collected and analyzed documents on the space-available travel program, such as DOD travel regulations and instructions, prior reports about expanding the program, and Sections 2641, 2648, and 2649 of Title 10, United States Code, which authorize the space-available travel program. To determine the effect an increase in eligible travelers would have on future usage of the program, we analyzed passenger data from fiscal years 2009 through 2011 and estimates of the number of potentially eligible travelers under the current proposal, as well as projected usage. To determine the effect an increase in eligible travelers would have on DOD's original intent for the program, we obtained and analyzed DOD documents and data and interviewed cognizant DOD officials. To identify logistics and maintenance problems associated with the program, if any, we obtained and analyzed testimonial evidence from DOD officials and space-available travelers. We also visited two air terminals to observe the space-available travel process and interview space-available travelers about their experiences with the space-available program; however, the data are not generalizable and provide only a small window of experiences of passengers of the space-available travel program.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2012 through September 2012 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

In summary, we found the following:

According to DOD data, over 500,000 passengers used the space-available travel program from fiscal years 2009 through 2011. DOD data show that the five most-used air terminals have limited seats available. Specifically, seats for the three most-traveled destinations from each terminal were near capacity in Fiscal Year 2011. While there were some unused seats

---

<sup>3</sup>Pub. L. No. 112-81, § 362 (2011).

for space-available travel, these may be seats on routes with less-desirable destinations or during less-popular travel months.

Additionally, DOD officials indicated that existing challenges with usage of the space-available travel program, adherence to DOD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance would be exacerbated if the number of eligible passengers were to increase.

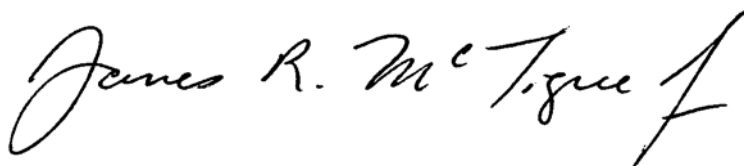
- On the basis of Defense Manpower Data Center data, we estimated that the expansion of the space-available travel program could lead to additional space-available travelers not obtaining seats. Expanding eligibility to include international travel for gray-area retirees (retired reservists under the age of 60 who are currently eligible to travel space available within the United States) and their dependents; international travel for reservists and their dependents; and domestic and international travel for widows and their dependents could lead to around 20,000 travelers not being able to obtain space-available seats. However, this estimate may be low since it is based on the percentage of eligible travelers who used space-available travel in 2011 but does not include those who were unable to obtain space-available seats in 2011.
- According to DOD officials, expanding the space-available travel program could also adversely affect uniformed service members, for whom DOD created the program. For example, according to Air Mobility Command officials, a lower-priority passenger who already has a seat cannot be rotated off of an en-route flight at a subsequent stop by a space-available traveler in a higher-priority category. Therefore, the higher-priority uniformed service member may have to take leave while waiting to obtain a space-available seat on another flight or purchase a ticket with a commercial airline.
- According to DOD officials, expanding the pool of eligible passengers would also increase the burden on terminal personnel and require additional maintenance. Each space-available traveler requires terminal personnel assistance for documentation review, check-in processes, baggage handling, security screening, responding to travel questions, and transportation to and from the aircraft. DOD officials also stated that space-available travelers' use of terminal facilities results in additional maintenance costs for waiting areas, restrooms, and vending machines.
- DOD believes budgetary constraints and planned reductions could affect future availability of seats. For example, the number of seats for space-available travel could be reduced if the number of DOD missions decreases because of DOD efficiency efforts or flight routes change based on force structure changes and mission requirements. DOD officials also stated that 90-95 percent of space-available travel is on commercially contracted aircraft, and DOD is planning to reduce its use of contracted aircraft as a result of mission reductions and budgetary constraints.
- We found that the majority of the 24 space-available travelers interviewed at Dover Air Force Base and Baltimore Washington International Airport were generally satisfied with traveling space-available. The results of these interviews are not generalizable to a larger group and only represent observations made by these specific travelers on that particular date at those particular locations.

Additional information on the results of our work is contained in enclosure I. We are not making any recommendations for agency action or raising any matters for congressional consideration. DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs responded to a draft of this report with no comments.

----

We are sending copies of this report to appropriate congressional committees and to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In addition, this letter will be made available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

Should you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7968 or [mctiguej@gao.gov](mailto:mctiguej@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this letter. Key contributors to this report were Marie Mak, Assistant Director; David Keefer; Caitlin Kilpatrick; Joanne Landesman; Jennifer Madison; Gregory Marchand; Erika Prochaska; and Terry Richardson.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James R. McTigue, Jr." followed by a stylized flourish.

James R. McTigue, Jr., Acting Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management

Enclosure

Defense Logistics



---

***Defense Logistics: Space-Available Travel  
Challenges May Be Exacerbated If  
Eligibility Expands***

---

**September 10, 2012**

---

Page 1

## Objectives

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 directed GAO to review the Department of Defense (DOD) program for space-available travel to determine the current and projected future capacity of DOD's airlift system, as well as the system's efficiency, among other things.<sup>1</sup> To address the required elements, we reviewed the following:

1. The number of passengers that used the space-available travel program from 2009 through 2011.
2. The effect that an increase in eligible travelers may have on the usage of the space-available program, adherence to DOD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance.

<sup>1</sup>Pub. L. No. 112-81, § 362 (2011).

## Scope and Methodology

To determine how many passengers used the space-available travel program from 2009 through 2011, we conducted the following work:

- We interviewed officials in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Transportation Policy and U.S. Transportation Command and its Air Mobility Command about the usage of the space-available travel program.
- We requested program data from DOD. However, limited data are collected by DOD since it does not consider the space-available program a DOD mission and additional DOD funds cannot be spent to support space-available travel. We analyzed traveler data from 2009 through 2011, because DOD retains space-available data only from the last 3 fiscal years.
  - For this review, we define efficiency as maximizing the amount of space-available seats used; however, to determine seat maximization, we would need to analyze data on how many seats were available, used, and unused, and the number of travelers who did not obtain seats on desired flights. DOD does not collect data on how many travelers do not obtain seats on specific flights, therefore DOD does not collect all the data necessary to make this determination.

## Scope and Methodology (cont'd)

To determine the effect an increase in eligible travelers would have on the usage of the space-available program, adherence to DOD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance, we conducted the following work:

- We interviewed officials in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Transportation Policy; the Departments of the Army, Air Force, and Navy; the Marine Corps; the Joint Staff; the U.S. Transportation Command and its Air Mobility Command; the Defense Manpower Data Center; and the Department of Veterans Affairs about the space-available travel program.
- To determine the effect an increase in eligible travelers would have on future usage of the space-available program, we analyzed DOD passenger data from fiscal years 2009 through 2011 and estimates of proposed newly eligible groups, including calculating projected usage. We limited our analysis to the last 3 fiscal years (2009 through 2011) because the DOD data system retains space-available data only from the last 3 fiscal years.

## Scope and Methodology (cont'd)

To determine the effect an increase in eligible travelers would have on DOD's original intent for the program, including the program's cost, if any, we obtained and analyzed DOD documents and data and interviewed cognizant DOD officials to corroborate our analysis.

- We analyzed Sections 2641, 2648, and 2649 of Title 10, U.S. Code, which authorize the space-available travel program. We also obtained DOD regulations and reports on the space-available program and analyzed these documents to determine DOD's original intent for the program.
- According to DOD officials, DOD does not collect data on the cost of the program because additional DOD funds cannot be spent to support space-available travel.

To identify logistics and maintenance problems, if any, associated with the space-available program, we obtained and analyzed testimonial evidence from DOD officials and space-available travelers. We visited two air terminals to observe the space-available travel process and interview space-available travelers about their experiences with the space-available program.

## Summary

- According to DOD data, over 500,000 passengers used the space-available travel program from fiscal years 2009 through 2011.
- According to DOD officials, existing challenges with space-available usage, adherence to DOD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance would be exacerbated if the number of eligible travelers were to increase. Also, we estimated that the expansion of the space-available travel program could lead to additional space-available travelers not obtaining seats.

# Space-Available Program Designed as a Privilege for Members of the Armed Forces

- The space-available travel program can be traced back to a 1907 statute.<sup>1</sup>
- DOD's implementing regulation designed the program as a privilege for members of the armed forces, to provide relief from the rigors of duty. Retired members of the armed forces were also given the privilege in recognition of a career of such rigorous duty.<sup>2</sup>
- Space-available travelers are permitted to travel on military-owned or contracted aircraft with surplus seats only when it does not interfere with the DOD missions that the aircraft are fulfilling.
- These aircraft are not permitted to be rerouted or rescheduled to accommodate space-available passengers.
- Under 10 U.S.C. § 2648, space-available transportation must be without expense to the United States. DOD's implementing regulation states that "no (or negligible) additional funds shall be expended and no additional flying hours shall be scheduled to support this program."

<sup>1</sup>Act of March 2, 1907, ch. 2511, 34 Stat. 1158-59.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Defense Regulation 4515.13-R, *Air Transportation Eligibility* (November 1994) (incorporating change 3, Apr. 9, 1998).

## Background



# Space-Available Travelers Are Placed in One of Six Priority Categories

Space-available travelers are currently placed in one of six categories, on the basis of their status and situation. The category determines a traveler's priority for travel; category I travelers are given the highest priority.

**Table 1: Space-Available Travel Priority Categories**

Category	Examples of eligible travel <sup>a</sup>
I	Emergency leave for verified family emergencies by uniformed service members, DOD civilians, and accompanied dependents
II	Environmental and morale leave for sponsors (including uniformed service members, certain DOD civilians, and DOD teachers during the school year for training) and their dependents who are stationed overseas at installations that include difficult or adverse environmental conditions
III	Ordinary leave for travel by uniformed service members and accompanied dependents
IV	Environmental and morale leave for DOD teachers during the summer and unaccompanied dependents who are stationed overseas at installations that include difficult or adverse environmental conditions
V	Permissive temporary duty travel for military personnel, and overseas travel by dependents who are college students attending an overseas branch of a U.S. university
VI	Travel by retired uniformed service members and their accompanied dependents, certain reservists (including "gray area retirees" who are entitled to retirement pay at age 60) traveling within the United States, and Reserve Officers' Training Corps students traveling within the United States

Source: DOD.

<sup>a</sup>Examples are drawn from the DOD chart of eligible space-available travelers, priorities, and approved geographical travel segments, table C6.T1 in DOD 4515.13-R.

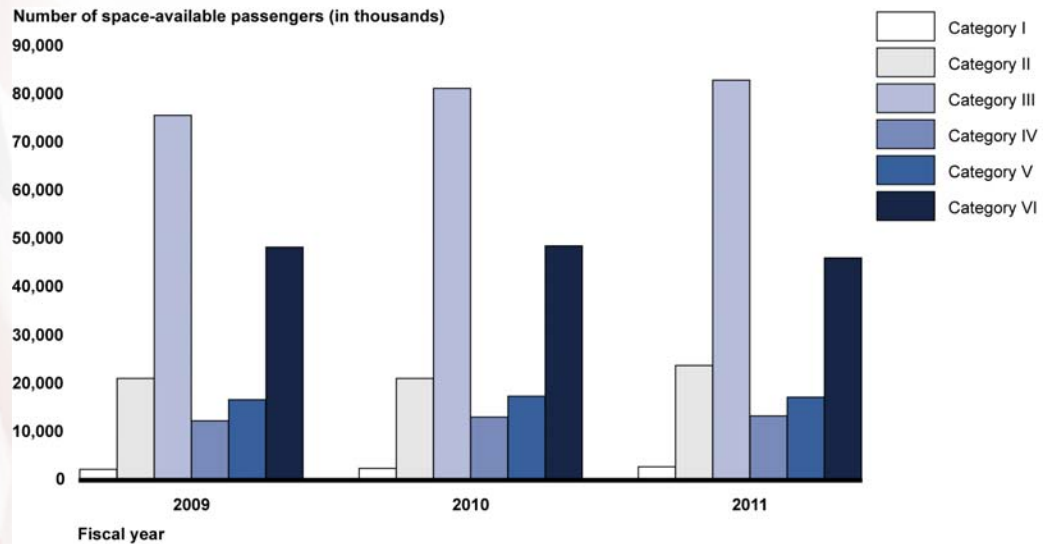
Page 8

## Objective 1



# Majority of Space-Available Passengers Are in Categories III and VI

Figure 1: Space-Available Usage by Travel Category from Fiscal Year 2009 through Fiscal Year 2011



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

## Objective 1



# DOD Had Some Unused Seats for Space-Available Travelers

**Table 2: Space-Available Usage from Calendar Year 2009 through 2011**

Calendar year	Space-available passengers <sup>a</sup>	Unused seats for space-available travelers
2009	172,715	60,103
2010	186,550	67,916
2011	194,408	56,725
<b>Total</b>	<b>553,673</b>	<b>184,744</b>

Source: DOD.

<sup>a</sup>Space-available passengers are the number of travelers who obtained a space-available seat on a flight. This number does not reflect the number of space-available travelers that did not obtain seats on their intended flights.

Unused seats may be on routes with less-desirable destinations or during less-popular travel months. For example, DOD officials stated that demand for space-available seats during the summer months is generally higher than seats available.

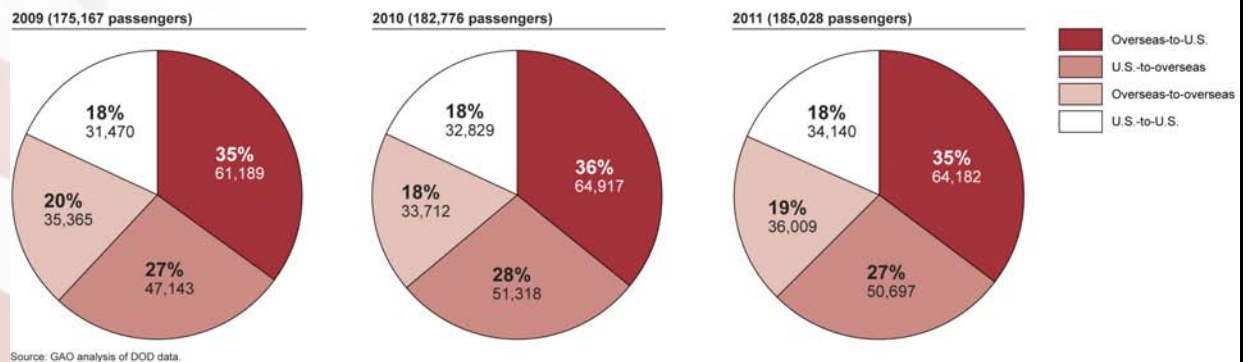
## Objective 1



# Over Half of Space-Available Travel Occurs between the United States and Overseas Locations

During fiscal years 2009 through 2011, overseas-to-U.S. and U.S.-to-overseas travel routes had more space-available passengers than routes within the United States or between overseas locations.

**Figure 2: Number of Space-Available Passengers on U.S. and Overseas Routes**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

## Most-Used Air Terminals Have Limited Seats Available

According to DOD officials, the five air terminals most used are

- Baltimore Washington International Airport in Maryland,
- Dover Air Force Base in Delaware,
- Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam in Hawaii,
- Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and
- Travis Air Force Base in California.

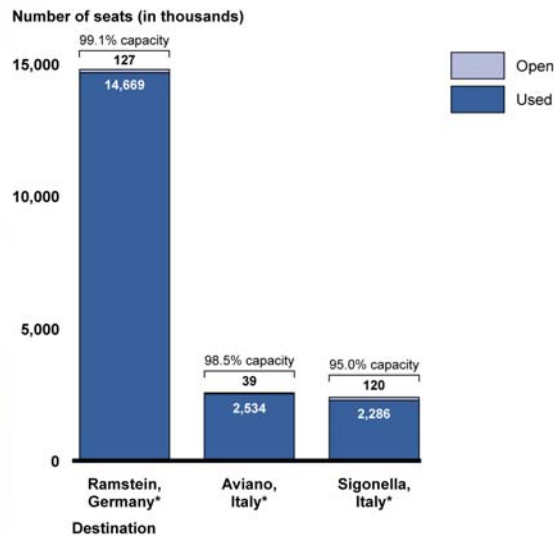
DOD officials provided the number of seats used, available, and open for the three most-popular destinations from each of the five air terminals, but data for the number of travelers who did not obtain seats on desired flights are not collected. The data are from fiscal year 2011 and are displayed on the next five pages.

## Objective 1



# Baltimore Washington International Airport Has Limited Seats Available

Figure 3: Seat Usage to the Three Most-Traveled Destinations from Baltimore (Fiscal Year 2011)



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

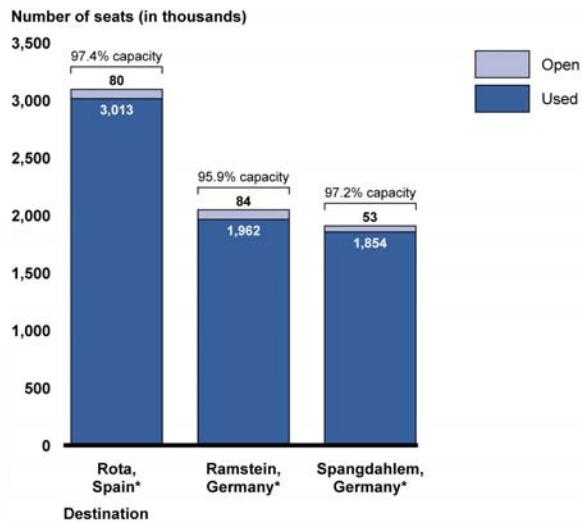
\*Overseas destination.

## Objective 1



# Dover Air Force Base Has Limited Seats Available

Figure 4: Seat Usage to the Three Most-Traveled Destinations from Dover (Fiscal Year 2011)



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

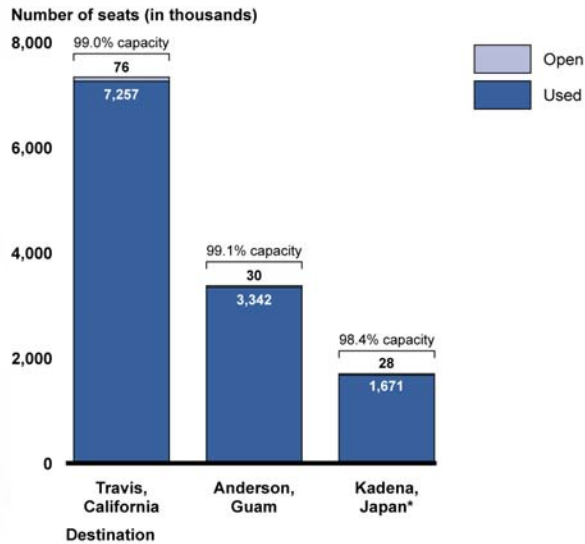
\*Overseas destination.

## Objective 1



# Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam Has Limited Seats Available

Figure 5: Seat Usage to the Three Most-Traveled Destinations from Hickam (Fiscal Year 2011)



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

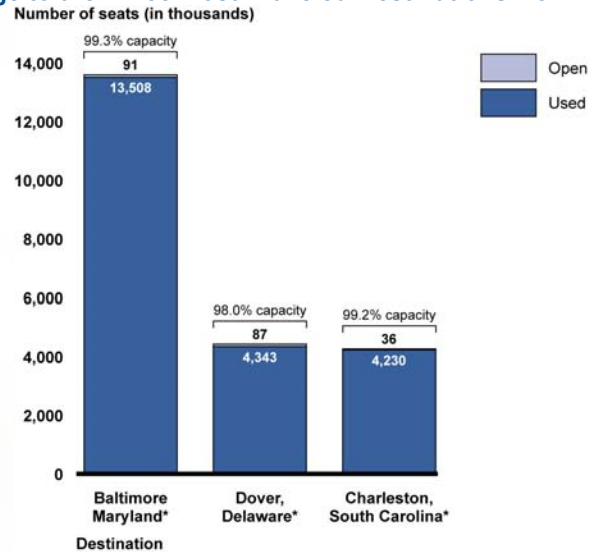
\*Overseas destination.

## Objective 1



# Ramstein Air Base Has Limited Seats Available

Figure 6: Seat Usage to the Three Most-Traveled Destinations from Ramstein (Fiscal Year 2011)



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

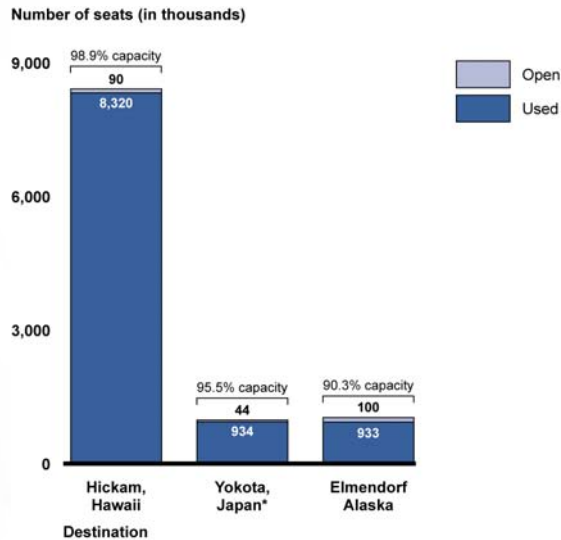
\*Overseas destination.

## Objective 1



# Travis Air Force Base Has Limited Seats Available

Figure 7: Seat Usage to the Three Most-Traveled Destinations from Travis (Fiscal Year 2011)



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

\*Overseas destination.

## Objective 1



### **Seats to the Three Most-Traveled Destinations Are Near Capacity at Each of the Most-Used Terminals**

Seats for the three most-traveled destinations from each of the most-used terminals were near capacity in Fiscal Year 2011.

- Eleven of the 15 most-traveled routes from the most-used terminals were U.S.-to-overseas and overseas-to-U.S. (international) flights and these routes were at 97.6 percent capacity.
- Seats used on these routes account for around 34 percent of all of the international (U.S.-to-overseas, overseas-to-overseas, and overseas-to-U.S.) space-available seats used in Fiscal Year 2011.
- There were 1,085 open seats in Fiscal Year 2011 for the 15 most-traveled routes. This is about 2 percent of the 56,725 open (unused) seat totals for space-available travel.

## Objective 2



### Congress Is Considering Options to Reauthorize or Potentially Expand the Space-Available Program

Congress is considering reauthorizing the space-available travel program<sup>1</sup> or potentially expanding the eligibility of travelers to include<sup>2</sup>

- international travel for gray-area retirees and their dependents;
- international travel for reservists and their dependents; and
- domestic and international travel for widows and widowers of active duty and reservists, and their dependents.

<sup>1</sup>S. 3254, 112th Cong. 632 (2012).

<sup>2</sup>S. 2112, 112th Cong. (2012).

## Objective 2



# Potential Expansion Would Extend Eligibility to Additional Travelers

**Table 3: Number of Potentially Eligible Space-Available Travelers**

	Gray area retirees <sup>a</sup>	Reserves <sup>b</sup>	Widow(er)s of active duty personnel and reserves <sup>c</sup>	Total
Sponsors	37,535	1,313,423	16,909	1,367,867
Dependents <sup>d</sup>	408,450	1,523,517	45,755	1,977,722
<b>Total</b>	<b>445,985</b>	<b>2,836,940</b>	<b>62,664</b>	<b>3,345,589</b>

Source: GAO analysis of Defense Manpower Data Center data.

<sup>a</sup>Gray area retirees are reservists who have completed 20 years of service but have not reached the age of 60. These retirees are currently eligible to travel space-available within the United States and certain territories. The proposed expansion would make these people eligible for international travel.

<sup>b</sup>Reserves includes the National Guard. These members are currently eligible to travel space-available only within the United States and certain territories. The proposed expansion would make these people eligible for international travel.

<sup>c</sup>Widow(er)s are unremarried spouses of deceased active duty and reserve members of the armed forces. The actual number of widow(er)s eligible for space-available travel may be higher than shown in the table because it only includes individuals who receive federal benefits.

<sup>d</sup>There may be some minor over- or under-counting of dependents because these numbers were generated using established criteria for dependents, which are currently under review.

## Objective 2



# Potential Expansion Would Result in Additional Travelers Not Obtaining Seats

On the basis of Defense Manpower Data Center data, we estimated that the expansion of the space-available program would lead to additional space-available travelers not obtaining seats.

- Expanding eligibility to include international travel for gray-area retirees, reservists, and their dependents, and domestic and international travel for widows and their dependents, could result in an estimated 77,000 additional travelers per year.
- This estimate is based on an eligibility expansion of about 3.3 million travelers.
- We assumed that approximately 2.3 percent of the expansion population would travel space available. We based this assumption on 2011 usage data, which indicated an approximate 2.3 percent usage by the currently eligible population. However, this estimate may be low since it is based on the percentage of eligible travelers who used space-available travel in 2011 but does not include those who were unable to obtain space-available seats in 2011.
- In calendar year 2011, approximately 194,000 of the 251,000 seats open for space-available travel were used, leaving about 57,000 seats unused.
- Assuming the same number of open seats as in calendar year 2011, and that the 57,000 seats were filled regardless of flight destination, the expansion could result in about 20,000 travelers not being able to obtain space-available seats. However, this number is likely to be higher if additional travelers choose the most-used routes.

## Expansion Calculations Have Limitations

- Expansion data do not account for whether the DOD flight destinations are compatible with locations where space-available travelers want to go and do not account for seasonal differences in usage. For example, 11 of the 15 most-traveled destinations at the five most-used terminals were international destinations and near capacity, with 97.6 percent of the space-available seats filled. DOD officials also indicated demand for space-available seats during the summer months is generally higher than seats available.
- Gray-area retirees and reservists are currently eligible to travel within the United States and certain territories, therefore their travel is also included in the space-available seats used on flights within the United States.
- The number of available seats could be affected if the number of DOD missions decreases or the routes change based on force structure changes and mission requirements.

## Objective 2



# DOD Believes Expansion Could Adversely Affect Uniformed Service Members

According to DOD officials, expanding the space-available program could adversely affect uniformed service members, for whom DOD created the program.

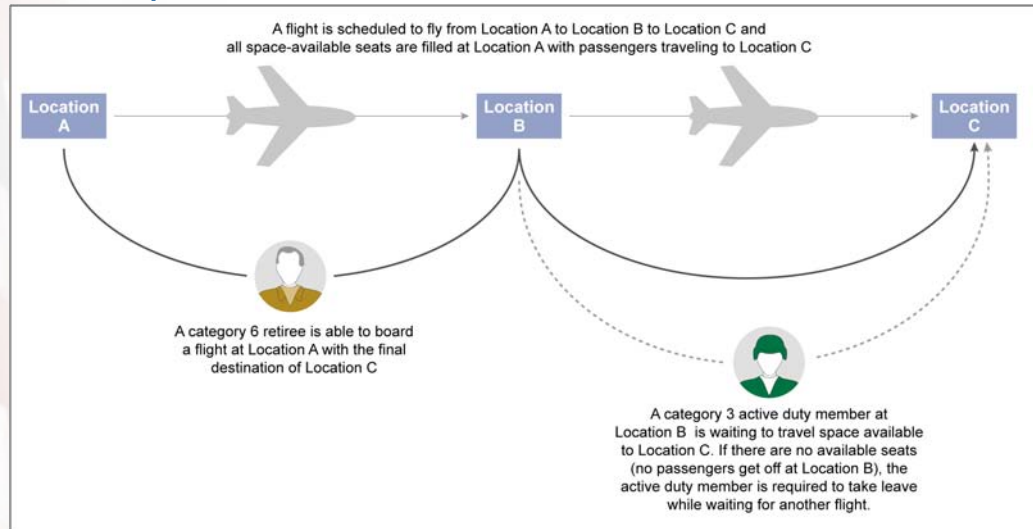
For example (see fig. 8 on next page):

- A flight with space-available seats is flying from Location A to Location B to Location C.
- A retiree who is flying space available (Category VI) is able to board the flight at Location A, with a final destination of Location C.
- At Location B, a uniformed service member on ordinary leave (Category III) is waiting to travel space available to Location C.
- If there are no available seats remaining after departure from Location A, the uniformed service member cannot board this flight, because according to Air Mobility Command officials, the Category VI space-available passenger cannot be rotated off the flight at the subsequent stop (Location B) by a space-available traveler in a higher priority category.
- This uniformed service member is required to take leave while waiting to obtain a space-available seat on another flight or purchase a ticket on a commercial flight.

## Objective 2

# DOD Believes Expansion Could Adversely Impact Uniformed Service Members (cont'd)

**Figure 8: Example of an Adverse Effect on a Uniformed Service Member**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD information.

## Objective 2



# DOD Believes Expansion Would Increase Burden on Terminal Personnel

According to DOD officials, expanding the pool of people eligible for space-available travel would increase the burden on terminal personnel.

- Each space-available traveler requires terminal personnel assistance for documentation review, check-in processes, baggage handling, security screening, responding to travel questions, and transportation to and from the aircraft.
  - For example, overseas space-available travel requires verification of passports, visas, and other pertinent documentation and compliance with host-nation requirements. Verifying the documentation of additional travelers would increase the burden on personnel at the passenger services counter.

## Objective 2



### **DOD Believes Expansion Would Lead to Additional Terminal Maintenance and Marginal Costs**

- DOD officials stated that space-available travelers' use of terminal facilities causes additional required maintenance. For example, additional travelers' use of waiting areas, restrooms, and vending machines in the terminals could require additional cleaning and maintenance.
- While the space-available program is by law without expense to the United States, DOD officials estimated that expanding the program would result in additional marginal costs.
  - For example, if the program were to be expanded to include overseas travel for gray-area retirees and their dependents, reservists and their dependents, and travel for widows or widowers and their dependents, officials anticipate that an additional \$1.2 million per year in fuel costs and an additional \$646,000 per year in manpower costs for processing travelers in terminals would be incurred. These estimates assume only the number of unused seats in calendar year 2011 (about 57,000) would be filled.

## Objective 2



### **DOD Believes Budgetary Constraints and Planned Reductions Could Affect Future Availability of Seats**

According to DOD officials, expansion of the space-available program is being considered while DOD is facing budgetary constraints.

- The number of seats for space-available travel could be reduced if the number of DOD missions decrease because of DOD efficiency efforts or flight routes change based on force structure changes and mission requirements.
- DOD officials stated that 90-95 percent of space-available travel is on commercially contracted aircraft, and DOD is planning to reduce its use of contracted aircraft as a result of mission reductions and budgetary constraints.

## Objective 2



# Space-Available Travelers Interviewed at Two Air Terminals Were Generally Satisfied

We interviewed 24 space-available travelers who were waiting for flights at Dover Air Force Base and Baltimore Washington International Airport. The results of these interviews are not generalizable to a larger group and only represent observations made by these specific travelers on that particular date at that particular location. The travelers made the following observations about their most-recent space-available travel experiences:

- Nineteen of the 24 travelers had positive experiences with traveling space available.
- Eighteen of the 24 travelers stated that their expectations for traveling space available had been met.
- Twelve of the 24 travelers obtained seats on their intended flights during their most-recent space-available travel experiences.
- Five travelers who did not obtain seats on their intended flights had to find lodging and wait an average of 5 days to get on a flight.
- Nine of the 24 travelers were traveling alone, and the other 15 were traveling with dependents.
  - Seven of the 9 travelers traveling alone had positive experiences with traveling space available.
  - Twelve of the 15 travelers traveling with dependents had positive experiences with traveling space available.

## Objective 2



# Space-Available Traveler Anecdotes Revealed Some Hardships

In addition to the overall observations, the space-available travelers we interviewed at Dover Air Force Base and Baltimore Washington International Airport related the following stories about traveling space available:

- A category II traveler at Dover Air Force Base wanted to obtain a seat on a morning flight to Rota, Spain. This flight had originally departed Dover for Rota the day before, but had to return to Dover due to mechanical difficulties. The category II traveler was unable to obtain a seat because the original space-available passengers—including passengers in lower priority categories—were already manifested on the flight. After not obtaining a seat on this flight, the traveler waited 4 more days, extended his leave, and anticipated that he would have to purchase a commercial ticket to Rota before his leave expired.

## Objective 2



### Space-Available Traveler Anecdotes Revealed Some Hardships (cont'd)

- A category III active duty service member, traveling with four dependents, incurred more than \$3,000 in lodging, car rental, and food expenses while waiting 11 days to obtain seats on a space-available flight at Baltimore Washington International Airport. Over the 11 days, the family attempted to obtain space-available seats on eight flights. Meanwhile, the active duty service member had to extend his leave because he could not get back to his duty station overseas.
- A category VI retiree waited 3 days for a seat on a space-available flight out of either Dover Air Force Base or Baltimore Washington International Airport. The retiree had originally tried to fly with two dependents, but he sent his dependents on a commercial flight with the hope that he could obtain one seat more easily than three. With no lodging available at Dover, the retiree slept in his car while waiting for space-available travel.

Page 30

(351720)

---

---

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.

---

## GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

---

## Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through GAO's website ([www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)). Each weekday afternoon, GAO posts on its website newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence. To have GAO e-mail you a list of newly posted products, go to [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov) and select "E-mail Updates."

---

## Order by Phone

The price of each GAO publication reflects GAO's actual cost of production and distribution and depends on the number of pages in the publication and whether the publication is printed in color or black and white. Pricing and ordering information is posted on GAO's website, <http://www.gao.gov/ordering.htm>.

Place orders by calling (202) 512-6000, toll free (866) 801-7077, or TDD (202) 512-2537.

Orders may be paid for using American Express, Discover Card, MasterCard, Visa, check, or money order. Call for additional information.

---

## Connect with GAO

Connect with GAO on [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#). Subscribe to our [RSS Feeds](#) or [E-mail Updates](#). Listen to our [Podcasts](#). Visit GAO on the web at [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov).

---

## To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact:

Website: [www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm](http://www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm)

E-mail: [fraudnet@gao.gov](mailto:fraudnet@gao.gov)

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7470

---

## Congressional Relations

Katherine Siggerud, Managing Director, [siggerudk@gao.gov](mailto:siggerudk@gao.gov), (202) 512-4400, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125, Washington, DC 20548

---

## Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, [youngc1@gao.gov](mailto:youngc1@gao.gov), (202) 512-4800 U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149 Washington, DC 20548

